

# Diary of a Craftworker



Poppy Porter

Poppy Porter is craft&design's Diary writer throughout 2008. Previously working in the world of law, she has recently made a major career change into craft and the creative industries.

www.poppyporther.co.uk  
E: poppy.porter@btinternet.com  
M: 0794 1117782

This instalment of Diary of a Craftsman sees my estate car and me on the road again, this time to The British Craft Trade Fair (BCTF) in Harrogate to do my first trade show. Also this month; my part time job is getting busier as my boss goes on maternity leave, a lesson in the importance and the often slightly random nature of networking, I get the feeling I need to do some thinking about the direction of my work and business, my first gallery show and of course lots of Grand Prix action as the Formula 1 season hots up (although I promise not to go on about F1 as this is *craft&design*, not Autosport).

One of the first considerations for my journey to BCTF was a simple one of distance. From where I live to Desire in Richmond was an easy commute. BCTF, however, was five hours drive north from Surrey to Harrogate. Luckily for me I have relatives conveniently located half way up the M1 in Leicester and also in Yorkshire, so I was very grateful to not only break my journey up, but also to be able to stay with them during the show. Invaluable for the first timer on a shoestring!

In Harrogate I began to learn the difference between the retail and the trade show. One particular difference I noticed was in the "shopping" style of buyers and the length of time you had to make your pitch.

I had come across the concept of the elevator pitch in the enterprise training I did last year, but never really thought that I would ever need to use it. The elevator pitch is the idea that you have the length of time it takes to go up a tall building in an elevator (about one minute) to get your whole point across, be it a sales pitch or just describing an idea, to a VIP. Initially the concept seemed so anti-artistic and corporate that it just repelled me. It is only now that I have been speaking to people about my work that I realise it is an essential to clear communications at a show. However, just because it is short does not mean it can't be relaxed and inviting as well as enthusiastic and passionate. Not the easiest of effects to achieve when you are really nervous!

The buyers at BCTF were people on a mission, they were at work, not browsing for fun, and if they were interested you had limited time to explain yourself and they often asked the most tricky questions, that almost brought me up short. However they were to the point and friendly and

looking to make contacts themselves, so even the shortest chats were often extremely productive. I'm not convinced my pitch is quite there yet, but I have certainly made progress with it.

I was in the Newcomers Gallery and Margeret Bunn had advised me when I was accepted into the show that buyers will often look in the first year and show interest, but this is often unlikely to result in orders. The orders are more likely to come in the next year and subsequent years when you have shown yourself to have staying power. This staying power is of course, the hardest thing to work at. She was right, I had plenty of promising leads to follow up but no orders.

If everyone wants you to have proved yourself before they take a punt on you, then how are you to progress? I am learning, slowly that it will happen in increments. Little baby steps, each event and experience has a way of leading to the next. Little leads connect to bigger leads, be it meeting someone useful as a contact or getting into a show or hearing a snippet of useful information in conversation. So far I have tried to take advantage of opportunities when they arise, and to be honest, trust my gut feeling about things. However closely I examine an opportunity in my decision-making, weighing up the pros and cons, there is always something in me that evaluates outside of the rational and it is usually right.

An example of a recent step in the right direction was one of those totally unpredictable events that really take you by surprise. My stepbrother-in-law, who is trying to do the same as me, except he is an opera singer, works in a wine merchants in Pimlico. He got talking to one of his customers who turned out to be the owner of a jewellery shop nearby, who often has designer makers exhibit in her shop. He exchanged my website details for hers, we got in touch, met and she offered me some cabinet space. She was even a Formula 1 fan so it was win-win all round. Having tried to get my work in various London galleries, to have this happen with no effort is a lesson in how doing less often gets you more. Little steps like this accumulate and I hope they will continue to do so until, without realising it, I have made a big step.

My business is at a very exciting stage; it has it's initial form, but I have reached a place where I need to take time to do some more planning, to

Manifold bracelet



think about where I really want it to go. I was not intending to revisit my business plan until October, but it seems like I need to have a date with it earlier. As my work and ideas evolve I need to take time out to, well, daydream. I have always found creative thinking can be mistaken for not getting on with things. Conventional wisdom says that staring out the window is not working, however, to me daydreaming or fantasising is just a way of planning or trying ideas on for size. I can never conjure up ideas when sitting in front of a blank piece of white paper or sitting at a desk. Who among you has had your best idea when on a train or out for a walk, in the shower or not really thinking or doing anything in particular at all?

While creative thinking is fantastic for what really matters, it really is no good at getting the bookkeeping and admin done. I am certainly learning that having systems is the only way to keep things in check. The amount of time I spend doing admin is surprising given that I am supposed to be a craftsman. This is where I am thankful for getting a really great part time job. My regular income at the moment comes from working for a wedding jewellery company called Yarwood-White Ltd. This is a successful and growing small business, five years old with five freelancers and one owner. I both make the jewellery and manage production for the company. There I am learning invaluable business organisation skills and am able to transfer some of the simple systems they use to the organisation of my own business. The wedding season is fully underway and the owner is on maternity leave so we are busy, and balancing the demands of Yarwood-White with the demands of my own business is tricky but essential if my own enterprise is to survive its early life.

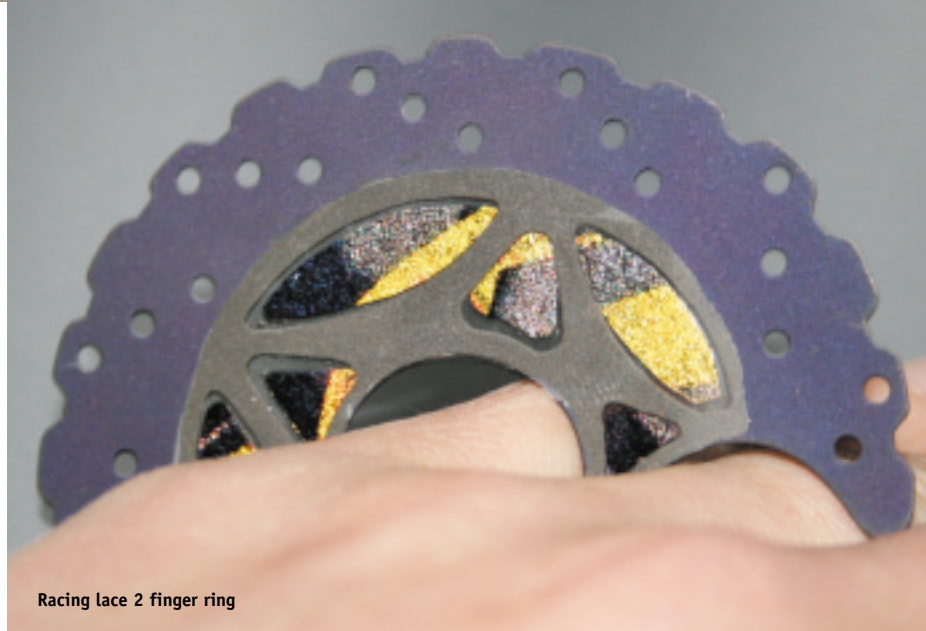
I am currently exhibiting in Group:Individual with the Farnham Maltings Jewellers and Silversmiths Network at The New Ashgate Gallery Farnham until 2 August.  
[www.newashgate.org.uk/pages/event/156.html](http://www.newashgate.org.uk/pages/event/156.html)



Stand at bctf on set up day



bctf open



Racing lace 2 finger ring